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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the value of a combination of evaluation-feedback procedures in achieving the objectives of a non-residential graduate-level course in sensitivity training. The three-credit course, involving T Groups of 12 students and a trainer, is a required course for all candidates for a master's degree in elementary education. The three instruments used before, during, and after the course (both to promote and to measure student learning and to combine self-report, self- and peer-group ratings) were: (1) Personal Relations Survey, which measures degrees of openness and feedback interpersonal situations; (2) Group Perception Questionnaire, which evaluates peer-group exchange of feedback in terms of encouraging, inhibiting, accepting, or rejecting responses; and (3) Rating Scale, which is based on ten criterion statements considered to be critical dimensions of T-Group learning. Data provided by the study (the collection and analysis of which is detailed in the report) indicated, among others, the following general changes in students who had completed the T-Group training program: (1) Students improved and did as well as trainers in evaluating critical dimensions of T-Group learning objectives. (2) Students relied less heavily on the cognitive dimension as the basis of their peer-group discriminations. (3) Students improved their skills as participant observers and became more effective in the use of process observations in group situations. (Author/JS)

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PEER GROUP EVALUATION IN SENSITIVITY TRAINING PROGRAM IN GRADUATE EDUCATION

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100-Word Abstract

Peer-group Evaluation in Sensitivity Training in Graduate Education

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Sensitivity training developed as a required course in a non-residential graduate program in elementary education, combined training objectives with assessment techniques using self-report instruments, and self- and peer-group ratings as a demonstration of the value of feedback principles for increased learning. Results indicate that students improve their skills as participant observers and become more effective in the use of process observations. When trainer ratings are used as criterion measures, students evaluate critical dimensions of T-Group objectives in the same manner as Trainer. Peer-group ratings of interpersonal dimensions are less correlated with Miller Analogies Test scores after sensitivity training than before.

Peer Group Evaluation In Sensitivity Training Program In Graduate Education

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Sensitivity training has most often been carried out in residential types of facilities (Schein and Bennis, 1965), usually in an attractive remote setting generating the concept of what has been referred to a "cultural island," allowing participants to reduce their defensiveness to achieve a more personal relationship. However, in reality most educational enterprises occur in non-residential environments where prospective students are engaged in programs concurrent with their professional preparation. Recently there is an increasing tendency to include in the curriculum at both the undergraduate and graduate levels a course which is essentially a T-Group conducted as a regular college course (Johnson et al, 1967).

The course to be described is a unique aspect of a Master's Degree Program in Elementary Education which requires sensitivity training in a non-residential setting designed to help students study processes of groups and means of increasing their effective performance in group situations. This form of training is based on a theory of learning which takes into account the complexity of human behavior and the structure and nature of forces underlying attitude change (Bradford, 1964). Training objectives are combined with assessment techniques using self- and peer-group ratings as a demonstration of the value of feedback for increased learning and improved group functioning.

DESIGN OF THE COURSE

Subjects:

Approximately 36 students are admitted to Lesley College each Fall to begin

their graduate work in education. They are divided into three groups of twelve, and are assigned a trainer qualified to apply the laboratory methods of training.

Method:

Initially, (1964) sensitivity training was offered in a 16-week semester, on a once-a-week basis for 2-hour periods. Thirty-two hours were thus scheduled for T-Groups, plenary sessions focused on behavioral science theory, and planned exercises to teach principles of perception and decision-making. Experience with this model indicated that the once-a-week sessions inhibited continuity and depth of group development. The following years, 1965-1967, students met twice a week for an 8-week block with the remaining 8 weeks of the semester devoted to writing a library research paper that requires students to integrate their experiences in T-Groups with pertinent readings in the behavioral science literature. The paper constituted one-third of their grade; the remaining two-thirds came from self- and peer-group ratings on criteria to be described. Since a major goal was to establish a proper balance between research process and a training design, various instruments were developed and used to integrate the research process, personal learnings and program applications.

As part of the assessment procedures, students were given a pre- and post-administration of the Personal Relations Survey (hereafter, PRS)[1]. The PRS is an experimental paper and pencil instrument measuring degree of Openness and Feedback (hereafter, O and F scales) when faced with typical interpersonal situations confronted in school systems, and classroom teaching. The PRS consists of twenty items that present interpersonal conflict situations using three distinct sets; pupils, colleagues, and supervisors. For each inventory item, the student indicates which of two alternative reactions (involvement vs. non-involvement) would be most characteristic of how he or she would cope with the situation described. The inventory yields scores of Openness and Feedback for the three sets as well as an Average Total Score.

After four T-Group meetings, students rated self and each other on a Group Perception Questionnaire (hereafter, GPQ), designed to evaluate peer-group exchange of feedback. Rating tasks of this nature are delayed until students have become familiar with the basic laboratory learning model as a participant observer and use of process observations. The GPQ consisted of a four-point rating scale to evaluate how students encourage, inhibit, accept or reject the exchange of feedback. Members of each T-Group also used a seven-point scale to rate themselves and peer-groups on ten criterion statements, considered by the training staff to be critical dimensions of T-Group learning: 1) expressing feelings; 2) checking understanding; 3) ability to recognize and work through conflict; 4) risk taking; 5) taking task-functions; 6) taking maintenance-functions; 7) offering helpful feedback; 8) making group norms explicit; 9) willingness to influence and be influenced; and, 10) trying new behaviors. The initial ratings had no bearing on grades, yet reinforced the process of confrontation among members in groups. At the end of the T-Groups, the participants repeated self- and peer-group ratings as part of their final grade. Trainer ratings on the ten criterion statements were used as the best external estimate as a standard to evaluate achievement of course objectives. At the close of the semester, each student arranged an interview with the author and was given complete feedback on all data. The individual analysis particularly focused on discrepancy scores between self and group ratings. Students were highly receptive to such evaluative feedback, and in almost all instances, the interview became a clinical-counseling situation relating performance in T-Group to other interpersonal experiences encountered in student teaching and graduate course work.

Results of Pilot Research:

All data gathered during the course was punched onto cards and prepared for computer analysis for several exploratory studies. Pre- and post-T-Group comparisons on the PRS data were analyzed by analysis of variance (Winer, 1962).

The data presented referred to the current students (N=36, 1967-1968) and past college populations (N=36, 1966-1967; N=36, 1965-1966). An additional four sensitivity training groups with twelve members in each group at Hunter College's NDEA Institute for training teachers to work with disadvantaged children in the summer of 1965 contributed data to the experimental form of the PRS described above. The results for the various populations are presented in Table 1 and 2, and show significant changes, indicating an increase in degree of Openness and use of Feedback as measured by the PRS at the end of the T-Group experiences.

Insert Table 1 about here

Insert Table 2 about here

A correlational analysis of the 28 variables gathered during the course also revealed a few salient features. The most significant data concerning Openness and Feedback scales are presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

The correlations in Table 3 indicate fairly consistent relationships between pre- and post-measures for Openness, Individual, Colleague, and Supervisory sub-scales. However, the intercorrelations for the F Scale do not indicate as high a relationship and the differential changes from pre- and post-measures do seem to raise a methodological problem as to whether students are adequately discriminating between the items of the O and F scales.

The analysis of the relationships between trainer criterion ratings and self- and peer-group ratings revealed several interesting findings. Self GPQ scores were significantly but only moderately correlated to trainer criterion ratings (.32, $p < .05$); however, the peer GPQ score was somewhat higher, (.69, $p < .0001$). The initial group criterion ratings, obtained midway during the T-Groups, resulted in a .59 correlation, $p < .0002$ with trainer ratings. The students' final

peer-group criterion ratings showed a high correlation of .74, $p < .0001$ with trainer-criterion ratings, suggesting that students improve and do as well as trainers in evaluating critical dimensions of T-Group learning objectives.

Since the course attempts to improve the student's abilities to participate, observe, analyze, and understand behavior in interpersonal situations, these findings may also reinforce the notion that students can be given the appropriate task of evaluating their learning goals in a sensitivity training experience. A recent study (Harrison, 1966) provides evidence that sensitivity training can affect the abstractness and complexity of concepts in interpersonal perception. In this connection, it is interesting to find no significant correlations between Miller Analogies Test raw scores (hereafter MAT), a verbal analogies measure of abstract ability, and pre-test scores on the Openness Scale of the PRS (.20, $p > .05$). However, on post-administration of the PRS, a significant correlation was obtained (.35, $p < .01$). The MAT scores also showed correlations with the initial group criterion ratings (.36, $p < .02$) and the final group criterion ratings (.32, $p < .04$) on data for the 1966-1967 population.

Table 4 presents correlations between MAT scores and initial and final group criterion ratings on combined data from 1966 and 1967 classes.

Insert Table 4 about here

These results replicate a significant relationship between MAT scores and group ratings. There is a general tendency for correlations to decrease on all but one of the post-criterion measures. Four of the ten items (3,4,7, and 10) show sizeable decreases. In two of the correlations (4, risk-taking and 10, new behavior) the decrease is so great that the post-test correlations are non-significant. If one assumes that MAT scores represent use of an "intellectual" factor, the initial basis for peer-group discriminations are closely tied to assessment of intellectual ability. After continued contact in T-Groups, criterion

ratings still tend to be correlated with such a cognitive factor, but there is less reliance on this dimension.

The rationale for introducing peer-group ratings as part of evaluation rests on the premise that sensitivity training can maximize learning about one-self by increasing opportunities that facilitate feedback and assessment of personal and group process learning goals. Such learning is a complex process which requires both intellectual and emotional support to enable students to try out new interpersonal behaviors. Authentic relationships and constructive use of feedback principles are probably the most critical dimensions for prospective teachers if they are to create adequate learning climates for pupils. An experienced-based curriculum can therefore help students assume more responsibility as a learner in a peer-group situation, and as an agent in helping others to learn. Such course organization may also reduce competition for "good grades" as major student objectives.

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Table 1

Lesley College (1966-67)

Analysis of Variance of PRS - Openness and Feedback Scales

Openness

Source	SS	df	MS	F
T-Groups	248	2	124	2.55
Treatments Pre-Post	338	1	338	6.95*
Interaction	40	2	20	.41
Within	3209	66		
Total	3825	71		

Feedback

Source	SS	df	MS	F
T-Groups	118	2	59	.81
Treatments Pre-Post	325	1	325	4.45*
Interaction	10	2	5	.06
Within	4819	66	73.02	
Total	5272	71	74.25	

* $P < .05$

Table 2

Pre-Post T-Group Comparisons on PRS

Hunter (Summer 1965) and Lesley College Populations (1965-66)

F Ratio #	Pupils		Colleagues		Supervisors		Overall	
Groups	O	F	O	F	C	F	O	F
4 Hunter 3 Lesley	.975	1.320	.855	.707	.363	1.017	.592	.882
Treatments (Pre-Post)	16.422**	18.495**	14.535*	32.868***	20.634***	15.987*	26.344***	30.869***
Interaction	.783	1.154	1.156	.507	1.734	1.536	1.435	.965

#df: 6 and 72 for groups
1 and 72 for treatments
6 and 72 for interaction

* $p \leq .0005$
** $p \leq .0001$
*** $p < .0000$

Table 3

Lesley College (1966-67)

Intercorrelations - PRS (8-week-interval)

O-Individual			F-Individual		
	Pre	Post		Pre	Post
O-Colleague	.79 *	.69 *	F-Colleague	.66 *	.50 *
O-Supervisors	.61 *	.68 *	F-Supervisors	.40 *	.57 *

* $p < .001$

Table 4

Correlations of MAT Scores and Peer-Group Criterion Ratings

(N=71 Lesley College 1966 and 1967)

Criterion Items	Pre-Group Rating	Post-Group Rating
1. Expresses feelings	.30 *	.34 **
2. Checks understanding	.34 **	.31 *
3. Works through conflict	.47 **	.36 **
4. Risk-taking	.34 **	.22
5. Task functions	.33 **	.29 *
6. Maintenance functions	.35 **	.29 *
7. Helpful feedback	.47 **	.31 *
8. Establishes norms	.39 **	.35 **
9. Influential	.27 *	.25 *
10. New behavior	.31 *	.10

* Significant at .05 level

** Significant at .01 level

Footnotes

[1] The PRS is a copyrighted instrument (1964) developed by Jay Hall and Martha Williams at the Southwest Center for Law and Behavioral Sciences, University of Texas. The original form of the PRS was constructed for managerial personnel; this form adapts the PRS to apply to educational populations.

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